

# Iqbal's ideas on Science and the Muslims

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Muslims were able to embellish their civilization with great achievements in the areas of science and technology. The Holy Qur'an not only speaks about spirituality but also on science and the natural world. The message found in the Qur'an was the driving force in encouraging the Muslims to go into science and research. Their zeal and zest to understand the hidden message of Allah the Almighty in the natural world made them learn from people of the earlier civilizations such as the Greeks, Persians and Indians. Adopt, adapt and assimilate or integrate was the approach used by Muslims in taking knowledge from others outside the religion. During their heydays, the Muslims were the pioneers in the many areas of knowledge and science that include mathematics, medicine, algebra, alchemy, philosophy, sociology, geography, etc. The great Muslim personalities and the centers established for learning during the peak of their civilization drew Europeans scholars to learn from them. In modern times, the European renaissance movement which started in the 14<sup>th</sup> century got the impetus from the culture of learning, doing research and exploration that was shown by the Muslim scholars of the Golden Age of Islam (750-1258). All the celebrated works of the Muslim scholars in science and research came to a halt after the fall of Baghdad in 1258 which triggered the demise of the Islamic empires. The decline of the empires and the internal conflicts within the Ummah made them lag behind other nations in the areas of science and technology. This research paper intends to explore the ideas of Allama Mohammed Iqbal (1873-1938) on science and what happened in the Islamic civilization that hindered their progress in science and research. Besides that, it also intends to explore the approach advocated by Iqbal towards science and how it can be used to make this world a better place for the Muslims and others as well.

Keywords: Iqbal's Ideas, Science, Muslim Ummah

## Introduction

This paper intends to make an exposition of the past glory of the Muslims, the sort of attitude they had towards science and learning, and what happened to them after the decline of the Islamic civilization, which started with the fall of Baghdad in 1258. By stating the past glory of the Muslims as a point of departure, the crux of this paper will focus on the ideas of Allama Iqbal with regards to science and the condition of the Islamic Ummah. In concluding the paper, the researcher writes a critique on the present state of the Muslims in the light of ideas given to the Ummah by Iqbal. The researcher feels that the critique should be seen as a way forward in restoring the lost dynamism of the Ummah.

## 1. The Golden Age of the Muslims

During the Golden Age of Islam (750-1258), Muslims were in the forefront in conquering knowledge through scientific research, exploration and expeditions. In their pursuit of mastering new knowledge and technology, Muslims were prepared and open to the idea of learning all that is positive from the earlier civilizations. As such they borrowed ideas from the Indians, Persians and Greeks as a way of enriching their own civilization. While pioneering into many scientific research works, Muslims were also interested in mastering Greek philosophy and the human sciences. Their enthusiasm for philosophy brought them closer to the ideas of the ancient philosophers like Socrates (469BC-399BC), Plato (427BC-347BC), Aristotle (384BC-322BC) and others (Rossidy,1998, Mohd Abbas,2011).

In realizing the fact that not all ideas of the Greek philosophers were acceptable to their Islamic worldview, these scholars used the approach of adopt, adapt and assimilate or integrate. Through this methodology, the early Muslim scholars took all those ideas which were non-contradictory to their religious values and faith. The scholars of the Golden Age of Islam not only borrowed ideas from others but they went on to further expand and come up with some original and innovative ideas. This was the spirit and culture of learning that was prevalent during the early Muslim era of knowledge expansion and exploration. Similarly, Western scholars too had borrowed ideas from Muslim scholars during the Golden Age of the Muslims. Europeans learnt philosophical ideas of the Greek from the translated and annotated works done by the Muslim scholars. Moreover, they also learnt from many pioneering works done by Muslim scholars and scientists in the field of medicine, astronomy, chemistry, mathematics, algebra, trigonometry, etc. At the moment, only a few Western scholars duly acknowledge the great contribution made by the Muslims towards science and scientific explorations (Langgulung, 1981,Mohd Abbas,1997).

Much of the scholastic works accomplished during the Golden Age of the Muslims were either diminished or came to a standstill during the Mongols invasion of Baghdad led by Hulagu Khan in 1258. During the Mongols invasion, not only great number of Muslims were butchered, but also their libraries with large volumes of books and original manuscripts were burnt to ashes

(Rossidy, 1998). The era between the fall of Baghdad and the European colonization of Muslim lands in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries kept the Muslim scholars occupied in their own polemic in the area of Islamic jurisprudence. In addition to this, they were also busy bickering and discrediting one another. This condition held them back from advancing any further in the field of science and technology. This situation persisted for very long in the Muslim world even during the dawn of the Industrial Revolution in Britain. During the Industrial Revolution, the West had managed to advance many steps ahead in the areas of science and research, leaving the Muslim world lagging behind. The Muslims who earlier did many pioneering works in the field of science either produced little or showed no progress in their research works while the Europeans made giant strides in science during the Industrial Revolution (Mahathir Mohamed, 2003).

In modern times, the effect of Western colonization and later globalization has caused a huge educational and technological gap in the Muslim countries when compared to the West. At the moment, all Muslim countries are liberated from the clutches of colonial rule. However, some even with their rich natural resources find it hard to be on par with the advanced nations of the world. One of the reasons for such a situation is due to their neglect in developing their science and technology.

## **2. The East and West Meet in Iqbal**

Allama Iqbal was not only a great Muslim thinker and a statesman of a distinguished quality; he was also a great poet and a mystic-philosopher. As a Muslim scholar during the Western era of colonization of the East, Iqbal's intellectual ability and performance were not just meant for finding solutions to the pressing issues of any one particular group. As a poet-philosopher and a humanist, he was interested in a wide spectrum of issues that were very important for the survival of the human race as a whole (Mohd Abbas, 2011). In describing how passionate Iqbal was in analyzing the problems and subscribing remedy to the human issues, Mustansir Mir wrote:

Iqbal was deeply interested in the issues that have exercised the best minds of the human race—the issues of the meaning of life, change and constancy, freedom and determinism, survival and progress, the relation between the body and the soul, the conflict between reason and emotion, evil and suffering, the position and role of human beings in the universe—and in his poetry he deals with these and other

issues. He had also read widely in history, philosophy, literature, mysticism, and politics, and, again, his catholic interests are reflected in his poetry (Mir, 2009)

As one who was well-grounded in religion and well researched in the state of mind of the people of the East and West, he was a brave scholar who spoke his mind through his speeches, poetry and philosophical writings. In assessing the boldness of Iqbal in calling for a change in the East and West, R.A. Nicholson (1983) who translated his *Asrari-Khudi* into English very aptly wrote in his introduction to Iqbal's work (1983): "Iqbal is a man of his age and a man in advance of his age; he is also a man in disagreement with his age" (xxx). Nicholson's words well explain Iqbal's nature and philosophy in life. He describes Iqbal as one who was critical of what he read in the bygone history and of what he observed in the unfolding of events during his lifetime. The words too precisely befit Iqbal's personality as a Muslim scholar who aspired to see change and progress within the Muslim society of his time. Iqbal's nature which was averse to what was the norm of his day had been admitted by him when he boldly stated his ambition in life and his critical nature in his poetry:

What can I do? My nature is averse to rest;  
My heart is impatient like the breeze in the poppy field:  
When the eye beholds an object of beauty  
The heart yearns for something more beautiful still;  
From the spark to the star, from the star to the sun  
Is my quest;  
I have no desire for a goal,  
For me, rest spells death!  
With an impatient eye and a hopeful heart  
I seek for the end of that which is endless! (Iqbal and Saiyidain, 1995: 11).

At the time when Iqbal first mooted his ideas on his new philosophy related to the ego development theory, some scholars from the Islamic circles prevalent at that time in India criticized and scoffed at his ideas. Although this was the case, Iqbal was persistent with his ideas right from their inception until the very end of his struggle in life. Iqbal as a critical thinker who had mastered the Western philosophy, and also as a man well versed in the problems of the Islamic world was always in the forefront, with his sharp criticism on the weaknesses found in the societies of the East and the West. In his much praised, although controversial, anthology of poems known as the '*Asrari Khudi*', which was published in 1915, this is what he said to his critics:

“I am the voice of the poet of To-morrow  
 My own age does not understand my deep meanings,  
 My Yusuf (Joseph) is not for this market  
 I despair of my old companions” (Iqbal, 1983:4).

As a Muslim philosopher of the modern age, Iqbal's ideas or rather his philosophical way of thinking on matters related to politics, social and religious reforms and progress in life are all in line or rather anchored in the true teachings of the two primary sources of Islam, namely the Qur'an and Sunnah. Like the message of the Qur'an, Iqbal's philosophy too has the appeal of a universal message to the whole of mankind. As such, in the process of formulating his own pattern of philosophy, he has eclectically combined the gist of philosophical ideas taken from prominent philosophers of the West and the East. In describing the ingenuity of Iqbal as a scholar who has read well in the many areas of knowledge, Munnawar (1985) said the following:

Iqbal had keenly studied philosophy of both the East and the West. He was well versed in literature, history and law. A student of science he perhaps never was, yet he kept a keen eye on the latest scientific discoveries and theories. Being thus equipped intellectually he was in a position to pick up good points from different systems of polity, philosophy, economics and what not, and weave them into a new pattern (18).

Through the marriage of ideas borrowed from the scholars of the East and the West, he created his own philosophy, otherwise known as the philosophy of the Self or the Ego philosophy. In his philosophy, Iqbal very much emphasized the existence of the life of the ego and its development in relation to the human personality development. As a Muslim scholar, Iqbal was well read in Western philosophy. Among the Western philosophers, Iqbal had immersed deeply into the ideas of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), William James (1842-1910), Mc Taggart (1866-1925), Goethe (1749-1832), and others. According to the many experts on Iqbal, though many philosophers and Sufis had influenced Iqbal in his philosophical thoughts, the three great philosophers who had significantly influenced Iqbal in developing his ego philosophy were Rumi, Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Henri Bergson (1859-1941). In formulating his philosophy of the ego through the eclectic method, as a Muslim scholar, Iqbal did not find any problem merging ideas taken from the good part of the Western philosophy with that of the Islamic heritage of the past. As a broad-minded Muslim scholar, he strongly believed that sharing of intellectual heritage between the West and the Muslims was not something new in the history of

human civilization. To him, it had happened before and can happen again and again. In defending this view point he wrote:

There was a time when European thought received inspiration from the world of Islam. The most remarkable phenomenon of modern history, however, is the enormous rapidity with which the world of Islam is spiritually moving towards the West. There is nothing wrong in this movement, for European culture, on its intellectual side, is only a further development of some of the most important phases of the culture of Islam. Our only fear is that the dazzling exterior of European culture may arrest our movement and we may fail to reach the true inwardness of that culture (Iqbal, 1996: 6).

From the above quote, one can deduce the understanding that what Iqbal liked about the West was its dynamism and intellectual advancement in the areas of science and technology, and not of its social life that was cut loose from any religious acquaintances. He cautioned the Muslims not to fall trap into this part of the Western civilization. In one of his poems, Iqbal gave the following advice to the Muslims:

The East in imitating the West is deprived of its true self.  
It should attempt, instead, a critical appraisal!  
The power of the West springs not from her music  
Nor from the dance of her unveiled daughters!  
Her strength comes not from irreligion  
Nor her progress from the adoption of the Latin script  
The power of the West lies in her Arts and Sciences  
At their fire, has it kindled its lamps (Iqbal in Saiyidain, 1977: 20).

Among the scholars of the East, Iqbal liked personalities like Imam Syafie (767-820), Imam Al-Ghazali (1058-1111), Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi (767-820), and Jamaluddin Al-Afghani (1838-1897). Besides that, as a man interested in mysticism, he also read deeply into the ideas of many mystic scholars, namely of Hallaj (858-922), Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) and Rumi. Of all the mystics of the East, Iqbal liked Jalaluddin Rumi most profoundly. Out of love for this scholar Iqbal immersed in the reading of Rumi's *Mathnawi* which contains 25,700 lines of poems. After knowing Rumi through his writings, Iqbal took this great sage as his spiritual guide in mysticism even though this great teacher lived 700 years earlier than him. His relation with his teacher was a spiritual one rather than a physical and temporal one (Mohd Abbas, 1992, Vahid, 1976).

According to Vahid (1976), Iqbal as a modern Muslim philosopher discovered in the *mathnavi* of Rumi a great deal of information and issues already mentioned in it long before the scholars and philosophers in the West started their quest to look for answers pertaining to questions on human nature, his existence and his survival on earth. Vahid's (1976) exact words on this point are:

In Rumi, Iqbal found Kant's Practical Reason, Fichte's Ethical Monism, Schleimacher's Religious point of view, Schopenhauer's urge for existence, Nietzsche's Will-to-Power, Bergson's Intuition and William James's Pure Experience. In fact, in Rumi, Iqbal found all that he had learnt to admire in various Western thinkers as well as all he had learnt from the Qur'an, and so he naturally turned to him as the Master (117-118).

Iqbal in comparing his time, mission and challenges in life with that experienced by Rumi, acknowledged that both of them had some similarities. Both these poet-philosophers were calling the Muslims of their respective time to cast off all fatalistic philosophy in life. At the same time they called the masses to be bold and daring in facing the challenges in life. These poets also called for the realization of the power of the human ego and to use it for the dynamic growth of man himself.

Any research on Iqbal's philosophy will reveal the undeniable fact that his philosophy is a fusion of ideas taken from philosophers of the East and the West. In his 'Stray Reflection' (1992), Iqbal himself had acknowledged and appreciated the fact that he had gained from the poets and philosophers of the East and the West. The following is one among the many quotes found in that book whereby Iqbal admitted the contribution of others to the structure of his thoughts:

I confess I owe a great deal to Hegel, Goethe, Mirza Ghalib, Mirza Abdul Qadir Bedil and Wordsworth. The first two led me into the 'inside' of things; the third and fourth taught me how to remain oriental in spirit and expression after having assimilated foreign ideals of poetry, and the last saved me from atheism in my student days (Iqbal, 1992: 61).

The reason why Iqbal liked these Western philosophers was none other than for their research oriented thinking, boldness, dynamism and creative intelligence. By getting to know them, either through their writings or in person, had created an impact in Iqbal's scholarly life. Even though Iqbal admired and emulated the good qualities seen in some of the Western philosophers, without fail he highlighted to them the faults and loopholes found in their system

of philosophy and education which are devoid of religious and spiritual essence. Below here are a few lines from his poetry that criticize the West:

The European man of wisdom does not possess a wakeful heart, although he possesses a wakeful eye (Bazm-i-Iqbal, 1969: 510)  
Believe me, Europe to-day is the greatest hindrance in the way of man's ethical advancement (Iqbal, 1953: xii).

Iqbal in his opinion on the Western culture felt that it deprives the European man of his vision and soul for a spiritual life. As such, Iqbal further ventured on to think that this modern European culture has lost its piety in the race for modernization. As a result, this loss of piety, has caused his soul, purity of conscience, high thinking and refined taste to disappear from his life. In another place in his poetry, Iqbal made the following statement:

The East perceived God and failed to perceive the world  
The West lost itself in the World and fled from God!  
To open the eyes on God is worship!  
To see oneself unveiled is life (Iqbal and Saiyidain, 1995: 19).

K.G. Saiyidain (1977) whom Iqbal acknowledged as a scholar who had precisely captured his thoughts and his philosophy of education in his book: Iqbal's Educational Philosophy wrote the following comments with regards to Iqbal's attitude towards the West:

He readily welcomes their spirit of research, their sciences, their strenuous striving to gain control of their environment. But he would certainly repudiate the merely superficial and sensational aspects of their civilization because they tend to weaken our self-respect, run contrary to some of our basic cultural values and give us an entirely false sense of being modern and progressive (23).

Besides his criticism on the West, Iqbal felt disturbed to witness the development that was taking place in the Muslim world. It saddened him to see the mushrooming of a kind of Sufism which preached to the masses to indulge zealously in all spiritual practices, and at the same time, either neglect or pay little interest in calling people to perform their worldly duties actively as mentioned in the Qur'an. It was clear to Iqbal that such a message was contrary to what the Muslims have been told to do in carrying out their duty as Allah's vicegerent. Iqbal's call for a dynamic participation in worldly life is very relevant to the following Qur'anic message:

*But seek, with the wealth which Allah has bestowed on you, the reward and happiness of the Hereafter. Do not forget your share (of the needs and provision) from this world, and be good (to others) as Allah has been good to you (by giving*



*you more than what you needed), and do not seek mischief in the land. Allah does not like the mischief-makers (Al-Qur'ān, Al-Qasās: 77; Basmeih, 2007).*

In analyzing the reason as to why people during the time of Iqbal thought that material world is a hindrance to the spiritual growth of an individual, one would discover that many analysts are of the opinion it has its reason in the historical development that took place in the Muslim world. Facts from the annals of history reveal that the political situation during Iqbal's time was not in favour of Muslims. The era of European colonization in the Muslim world robbed Muslims of their power to rule their own countries. This situation which started with the fall of the Ottoman and Mogul empires was later experienced by many Muslims countries. Devastated by the feeling of defeat, the morale of Muslims was at the lowest abyss. This made them withdraw from active participation in politics and social life. This pathetic situation also made them lag behind in the areas of economy and education. As a means of escapism from active participation in social and political life, the Muslim masses started to seek solace and comfort for their hearts by going into Sufism. By capitalizing on the state of helplessness of the Muslim masses, some Sufi scholars called the people to the spiritual path and for the purification of their hearts and minds. What was contained in their teaching was the subtle message to abandon this worldly life in search of a blissful and honoured life in the next world. Iqbal, who believed in the philosophy of action, realized this situation of the Muslims, who were unable to face the challenges of the modern world.

In assessing what was happening to the Muslims, Iqbal through his poems stressed that the teachings of the medieval mysticism in the East was wrongfully calling the Muslims to live a life of renunciation of this world in order to gain merit in the next world. Iqbal who could not find any justification for such teachings in the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet of Islam called for vitality and dynamism through his poems and philosophical writings. In particular, he called for the banishment of the teachings of the *Wahdah al-Wujūd* that preaches that the ideal status of an individual in his highest level of spirituality is to get his ego to gain union with the Ultimate Ego (God).

In studying Iqbal, one would discover that, at one point of his life before he left for Europe for his postgraduate studies, he was a great admirer of Ibn Al-Arabi and his teaching of the *Wahdah al-Wujūd*. Iqbal in his doctorate dissertation, 'The Development of Metaphysics in Persia (1908)' had praised Ibn Al-Arabi. Later in his intellectual life, he found out that Al-

Arabi's philosophy and theosophy was not suitable to the philosophy of ego that he was developing. Iqbal later realized that Al-Arabi had been influenced by the Neo-Platonic teachings which were more theosophical and showed less vitality towards life. Moreover, Iqbal too felt that the *Wahid al-Wujūd* concept was not in line with the basic teachings of Islam. This change in Iqbal's attitude from an admirer to a critic towards the type of Sufism brought by Ibn Al-Arabi can be seen clearly from the following description given in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy (1972):

Iqbal was for a long time an admirer of the Spanish Sufi Philosopher Ibn-'Arabi (1165-1240), the most consistent advocate of pantheism among Muslim thinkers. Very soon, however, he realized that this philosophy was foreign to the simple and invigorating message of Islam, as embodied in the Qur'an and as represented in the dynamic life of Muhammad and his followers (212).

In Iqbal's view, the type of *Tasawwuf* practiced during his days was not in line with the simple form of *Tasawwuf* practiced by the Prophet and his companions. Feeling disheartened with the type of Sufism practiced by the later generation of Muslims, Iqbal explained in his writing how and in what ways the Sufis have gone overboard in their spiritual practices contradicting themselves with what has been explained in the Qur'an.

Iqbal's criticism on the type of *Tasawwuf* practiced by some quarters of Islamic Sufi movement was mainly because he sensed that there were some similarities found in the teachings of *Tasawwuf* with that found in the Hellenistic, Vedantic and Buddhist philosophies of life. Very particularly, the Sufi teaching on '*Fanā' Fillah*' (self annihilation in God) in order to attain spiritual union with God seems to have some similarities with the Nirvana concept preached in Hinduism and Buddhism. According to Iqbal, the Sufi concept that preaches that at the highest level of spirituality, the soul of a Muslim reunites with Allah is a concept which is foreign to Islam. Contrary to such Nirvana concept, Iqbal believed in a concept which makes a distinction between Allah as the creator and man as His creation. Though the human soul originates from Him, the demarcation line between the Creator and the created (God and Man relationship) should be maintained under all circumstances. In addition to that, Iqbal also strongly believed that man in his highest level of spirituality cannot be absorbed into Allah. On the contrary, he believed that it is only possible for man to assimilate Allah's Divine attributes into his characters. This idea of Iqbal has its basis on what has been stated by the Prophet, when he said:

‘*Takhallaqū-bi-akhlāq Allāh* (Imbue yourselves with the attributes of Allah) (El-Muhammady, 2002) .

In analyzing further the famous concept of the *Wahdah al-Wujūd* that states, man in his relation to God is like a *Qatrah* (drop) while God is the *Bahr* (Ocean). According to the proponents of *Wahdah al-Wujūd*, the highest achievement of man in his spirituality is to get himself drown in the Ocean of God and become one with Him as he is just a trivial drop of water. As an antithesis to this teaching, Iqbal came up with a new concept which is contrary to the old idea of the Sufis. In his new concept, though he still preferred the analogy of God being the Ocean, and man being a drop slipping into it, he emphasized that it is not in the moral or spiritual teachings of Islam for man to go into a state of non-existence. Instead of man effacing his personality by slipping into the Ocean of God, man has to transform himself into a ‘Shining Pearl’ by having a more profound personality. In other words, Iqbal does not want man’s individuality to lose its existence but rather through the mercy and kindness of God, man should become dynamic by having some of His Divine attributes actualized in him. As a result of this, man becomes stronger in his personality (Mohd Abbas, 2011).

Besides his criticism on Sufism and its doctrine on the *Wahdah al-Wujūd* that has assimilated foreign elements into Sufi practices, Iqbal also found other reasons for the shortcomings of the Muslim Ummah of his time. Much of his observation on the state of stagnation of the Ummah was seen extensively described in his poetry and also in his philosophical writings. According to him, one of the factors that contributed to the cause of non-productivity, intellectual lethargy and backwardness of the Ummah was due to the conservatism prevalent in the intellectual circle. This condition which did not take into consideration the modern and latest developments in the fields of science and education made the Muslims lag behind the West in terms of intellectual achievement. Moreover, due to these reasons, the Muslims who were not prepared to face the challenges of the modern world failed to strategize and avert the occupation of their lands by the West. This condition of the Muslims caused them dearly as they became the subjects of the West. This pathetic condition made the Muslims lose their freedom of speech and action. Iqbal also believed that this state of being ruled by others also robbed the Muslims of their dignity and self-esteem. Iqbal (1996) once voiced up his

displeasure on conservatism which he thought could be damaging to the growth of knowledge and human personality:

Conservatism is as bad in religion as in any other department of human activity. It destroys the ego's creative freedom and closes up the paths of fresh spiritual enterprise. This is the main reason why our medieval mystic technique can no longer produce original discoveries of ancient Truth (145).

Inspired by the reformation works done by Al-Afghani (1838-1897), Iqbal too called for the reformation of the Muslim mind. His clarion call to the Ummah was to read the Holy Qur'an with all intensity and to produce action. According to him, the holy book of the Muslims is a book that calls for action/deed rather than a book of mere ideas. With such understanding of how the Qur'an should be approached, he criticized the old idea of plain reading for merits in the hereafter. Very particularly Iqbal attacked on the type of mysticism followed by the Muslims of his time. He was convinced that mysticism that called for spiritual upliftment at the expense of the abandonment of active participation in worldly things is against the true spirit of the Quranic teachings. Iqbal further emphasized that religious seclusion that keeps one from paying attention to the needs of the Ummah, correcting the evils, injustices and imperfections that happen within the society is an attitude which contradicts to the philosophy of the life of a *Khalifah* mentioned in the Qur'an. In realizing the intellectual lethargy prevalent in the Muslim world, Iqbal called for a dynamic participation of the Muslims both in the mundane and spiritual life. With this aim in mind, he cautioned the Muslims not to fall prey to the mystic and philosophical teachings that make them act passively towards life. In line with such an idea, Iqbal criticized Socrates, Plato and their Greek philosophy which paid much attention to the ideal than to the real life situation. Iqbal disagreed with Plato, the great Greek philosopher, when the latter despised the use of sense-perception in the pursuit of knowledge. Plato by overly emphasizing the ideal disregarded the importance of the real. By stating this world is just an illusion, Plato only paid attention to the ideal world. In Iqbal's view, disregarding the role of the sense-perception is a view in direct contradiction with the message of the Qur'an. Iqbal further emphasized that 'hearing and sight' are Allah's valuable gifts to mankind. Iqbal also criticized those Muslim scholars of the past who tried to interpret the Qur'anic teaching from the perspective of the Greek philosophy (Iqbal, 1996).

Further reading into Iqbal's ideas, will reveal the fact that generally the Muslim Ummah of his time was caught in the web of pseudo-mysticism and failed to follow the true spirit of Islam found in the dynamic teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Iqbal who realized the problems of the Ummah, wanted to bring upon an Islamic Renaissance by calling the masses to relieve themselves from the meshes of superstition, mental lethargy, immobility and ignorance. His effort as a poet-philosopher and a religious reformer was aimed at awakening the Ummah from its deep slumber to a state of consciousness in executing its mundane duties in a more productive and dynamic manner. In addition to this, he also opposed the Muslims for their state of withdrawal, renunciation and feeling defeated in facing the challenges of life. Iqbal vehemently opposed those who took religion to be a sort of escapism and plainly resign to the fatalistic concept of life. As opposed to all these serious problems of his time, Iqbal called for a true understanding of the religion that calls for all individuals, male and female to take the forward march in life towards the conquest of the material world along with the spiritual upliftment (Kazmi, 1995).

It was brilliant of Iqbal, to capitalize on the use of poetry as a medium to express his ideas towards social reform because it was part of the culture of the people living in the subcontinent at that time to pass their leisure reading and listening to poetry in the media and in public gatherings. Iqbal's works in the area of social and religious reforms are very much similar to what have been done by Imam Muhammad Abdul Wahhab (1703-1792), Al-Afghani (1838-1897), Syeikh Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) and other great Muslim reformers in Islam. Propelled by the zeal to witness progress within the Islamic Ummah, Iqbal called for the banishment of all superstitious beliefs that were misleading the masses in the Islamic world, particularly in the Indian subcontinent. By calling for the banishment of superstitious beliefs, he also called the Muslims to embark on the bandwagon of science which promises progress. To Iqbal, Muslims living in the modern world must learn to adapt themselves by utilizing science but at the same time they should not sever their relation with the past Islamic heritage. In other words, Iqbal called the Muslims to interpret the Qur'an and Sunnah in the light of the scientific age in which they were living. He also believed that, the failure on the part of Muslims to do so will be a state of stagnation and they would be left behind when compared to the others in the world, particularly the West. His exact words calling the Muslims to adapt to the ever changing

world were: “The task before the modern Muslim is, therefore, immense. He has to rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past” (Iqbal, 1996: 78).

Iqbal’s philosophy also clearly portrays his attitude which is very much in favour of science. To him, in order for man to progress spiritually he must look into the Qur’an as the ‘revealed book’ from God and the universe as the ‘open book’ of God. To him, science is not opposed to the religious teachings in Islam. Furthermore, he believed that scientific facts and findings can complement religion in strengthening one’s faith. Iqbal highlighted this point in the Reconstruction (1996) when he said:

“In our observation of nature, we are virtually seeking a kind of intimacy with the Absolute Ego; and this is only another form of worship” (45). “The scientific observer of nature is a kind of mystic seeker in the act of prayer” (73).

In his poetry, Iqbal called the Ummah to utilize science for the betterment of their lives by using it to extract the bounties that God has provided for them in the material world. In his opinion, man must use science and technology to bring out the hidden potential from the belly of earth to be utilized for his spiritual development:

Science is an instrument for the preservation of Life.  
Science is a means of invigorating the Self.  
Science and art are servants of Life (Iqbal, 1983:26).

Iqbal in further calling the Muslims to embrace a positive attitude towards the learning and usage of science and scientific research methods highlighted the point that the message brought by the Prophet is very much in harmony with the scientific revolution that was taking place during the early twentieth century. Iqbal in defending science also stated his view that on the whole, the message of the Qur’an is anti-classical. By stating this he felt the message of the Qur’an is a call for a dynamic life which utilizes scientific research and exploration:

The Prophet of Islam seems to stand between the ancient and the modern world. In so far as the source of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the ancient world; in so far as the spirit of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the modern world. In him life discovers other sources of knowledge suitable to its new direction. The birth of Islam, as I hope to be able presently to prove to your satisfaction, is the birth of inductive intellect. In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its abolition (Iqbal, 1996: 100-101).

### **3. Dynamism and Sustainability of the Ummah**

Going to Europe changed Iqbal in many ways. One marked transformation that happened in him is that he began to perceive humanity as a whole without looking at it based on colour, caste, nationality and geographical differences. This psychological makeup of a new Iqbal can be seen in his philosophy and poetry as he dedicated himself in highlighting the great culture and spiritual heritage of man. It was also around this time in Europe, that he started to think of Islam as a universal religion that can provide humanity with the much needed peace, security and prosperity. In sharp contrast to his thoughts, he also witnessed that the Muslim world had many shortcomings, that is because of not following the true spirit of Islam. While assessing the situation in Muslim countries, Iqbal found out that the people were caught in the meshes of superstitions, inactivity and ignorance. In his opinion, the prevalence of such scenarios in a way caused the Muslims to dwindle in their spirit towards a dynamic life in bringing progress in their lives. In realizing the predicament of the Muslims, Iqbal wanted to bring an Islamic Renaissance by directing his philosophy and poetry aimed at awakening the Ummah from its deep slumber towards realizing the demands of the modern world. As a result of his visit to Europe, his message to the Muslims was aimed at calling them to renounce backwardness and to have a positive attitude towards scientific learning and exploration in broadening the horizon of their thinking. Iqbal became an advocate for scientific research in the Muslim world of his time. In many ways this resembled Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the founder of the Aligarh University of India (Kazmi, 1995).

After making a diagnosis of the problems battering the Ummah, Iqbal without any self-proclamation took on the role of a religious reformist. It was his intention to revive the Ummah of its religiosity towards Islam and to restore its dignity and glory which were once enjoyed by it during the Golden Days of Islam. This role of Iqbal as a religious reformer was recognized by many scholars in Iqbal. Attitudes of total belief and dedication for a rightful cause and for a higher purpose in life was seen in Iqbal as a preparation for the task of bringing change. Bilgrami (1966), in his writing on Iqbal was able to capture Iqbal's passion and compassion in wanting to change the mindset of Muslims of his time, when he wrote:

Iqbal has rightly been called the mainspring of Muslim renaissance. He devoted the best part of his life to the careful study of Islam, its laws, polity, culture, history and literature. He was convinced of Islam 'as a living force for freeing the outlook of man from its geographical limitations.' He firmly believed that 'religion is a power of utmost importance in the life of individuals as well as states' and in order to convince the word of these eternal truths he did not merely devote his life in giving expression to his thoughts and feelings in his philosophy and poetry but also passed many restless nights praying to God (iv-v).

Iqbal during his postgraduate studies in Europe in the years between 1905-1908, and later through his travel to the European cities, felt fascinated by the scientific development taking place there. His fascination for scientific research is a further advancement to what he read in the Qur'an. As a religious book, the Qur'an contains many scientific data, and calls for the observation and contemplation on the wonders found in the creations of God in the universe, flora and fauna. To Iqbal, the exploration, observation and investigation done by the scientists is a kind of mystic behaviour trying to establish an intimacy with the Creator. Furthermore he believed that the physical sciences provide a sort of spiritual meaning to men who contemplate and ponder over God's wisdom behind His creations. Iqbal also stated, that on the spiritual and philosophical levels, the observation of nature teaches him the behaviour of God. In other words, nature which equates to God's habit is the portrayal of His existence. Iqbal's attitude towards science is the likeness shown by scholars such as Ibn Sina (980-1037), Al-Khawarizmi (780-850), Al-Biruni (973-1048) and others of the medieval era. In modern times, Iqbal's emphasis on scientific research is the echoing of what had been said by Jamaluddin Al-Afghani (1838-1897) and Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905).

In analyzing Iqbal's ideas and advice for the Islamic Ummah, one would come to recognize that as religious reformer all his works in poetry and philosophy were aimed at bringing the Muslims out of their backwardness, superstitious beliefs, conservatism and passivity in life towards a state of preparedness in facing the challenges of the modern world. In his view, the message of the Qur'an is not all rituals (Zikr) but also scientific (Fikr). As Muslims, we should possess both these two aspects mentioned in the Qur'an in order to fulfill our duties in this world as Allah's vicegerents. In line with Iqbal's vision for the survival of the Ummah, modern day Muslims should be prepared to learn from others, particularly from the West, the latest development in the areas of science and technology for the betterment of the Ummah and humanity at large.



#### 4. Critique

The present condition of the Islamic Ummah when viewed in the light of what has envisioned by Iqbal is one which is pathetic. The scenario in the Muslim world depicts that the Muslims have not moved very far from the conditions they were in during the time they were subjugated by the Western colonial powers. Due to colonization or for other reasons, the Ummah is still lagging behind the other nations in the world in terms of science and technology. The riches in many Muslim countries in the form of petro-dollars given by Allah SWT is not put to good use in bringing the sustainable development by employing science and technology. Many oil rich countries in the Muslim world use billions of dollars for the purchase of huge armaments from the West not only for national defense purposes but at times to be used to suppress and oppress their own citizens.

Due to the lack of infrastructure such as the scientific research centers, scientists and scholars in the Muslim world migrate to other European countries which can cater for their advancement in their areas of specialization. This brain drain phenomenon that happens in the Muslim world further hinders and delays the progress and development in many Muslim countries. In realizing this situation, governments in the Muslim countries should try to regain this lost talented professionals by giving them not only attractive incentives but also by investing a great deal of money in providing the much needed physical infrastructure to them. By having such facilities will also allow Muslim countries to practice 'brain retention'. Through the 'brain retention' programme, these countries can withhold their young and talented citizens from migrating to the First World countries in the West. Besides that, Islamic centers for learning should not only concentrate on the revealed knowledge but also establish faculties for the study and research in the areas of human and natural sciences. The study of science should be given equal emphasis at all levels of schooling in the Muslim world.

It is hoped that by making the changes stated above, Muslims would be able to bring back the past glory and fame once enjoyed by them. The Islamic Ummah which was once the leader of other societies in the world at present being led by others due to its failure in understating the true message of the Qur'an which is the *Zikr* and *Fikr*.

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